

More than a stamp

As the Leytonstone, Wanstead & District Philatelic Society celebrates its 75th anniversary **David Pashby**, honorary secretary of the society, looks back at their history and explains the world of philately



The Leytonstone, Wanstead & District Philatelic Society (LWDPS) had its inaugural meeting on 26 October 1936. Six enthusiasts, attracted by a notice in the window of a local chemist, met in the premises of Mr Chiswell, who traded in Leytonstone High Road as Price & Co.

When Mr Chiswell married there was no longer room for club meetings and over the next few years the venue changed several times. Attendance was now often 10-15 at each meeting and it was sometimes difficult fitting everyone in. The Second World War changed things. Somehow the club survived, often with just four people at a meeting. Then, shortly after the War, the new community centre opened at Wanstead House and attendance increased – the Society has met there ever since.

In 1944 we were one of the founder members of the Association of Essex Philatelic Societies (AEPS) along with Colchester, Forest, Ilford and Southend. Ilford Philatelic Society has since disappeared, but the other three survive and have been joined by

more than 25 others since. The AEPS promotes philately throughout Essex and it does so by maintaining lists of speakers, displays and judges for competitions so that we are not all reliant upon our own members for entertainment at meetings.

A member society of the AEPS organises an autumn rally or a spring event each year and Leytonstone hosted the first convention in June 1946, in Leytonstone library. Member societies compete in competitions (stamps, postal history, thematics, etc) for various awards. There are always lots of dealers at these events; collectors come from all over Essex and beyond and they usually do good business. LWDPS has hosted a number of conventions, rallies and spring events since 1944. We try to have inter-society visits each year, when a small team of people come from a neighbouring society to give us a show, or we visit them.

You may ask "why 'philatelic society'?" Isn't 'stamp club' good enough? Well, no, it isn't. A stamp collector does just that, he collects stamps. A philatelist does that too, but he doesn't stop there.

We also like to study our stamps, or the postal system for which they were created.

A few collectors specialised in Penny Blacks, the first stamp ever issued (1840). These are not all identical, but can be distinguished by the different letters printed in the lower corners. The various printing plates can also be identified.

Another man collected anything he could do to do with post boxes attached to Amsterdam trams. He was interested in the postal markings on the envelopes, applied when the box was emptied at the end of a run and the contents deposited in a nearby post office. On a grander scale, another enthusiast had covers from all the stopping points of various mail-carrying steamers on northern Canadian rivers. One of our members collected anything philatelic to do with the German occupation of the Channel Islands. He exhibited some of the material in a competition and the judge grumbled: "All this information comes from a book." "Yes," said the exhibitor, "I wrote the book."

And yet others collect 'pre-stamp covers', which travelled before that particular country had introduced its first stamp. The world's first stamp, after all, appeared in 1840 but postal services existed long before that.

All this is at the deep end of philately. Can the average collector participate in any of this? Well yes, he or she can. The obvious step is to decide which country's or countries' stamps you want to collect (you simply can't collect them all, there are far too many). But that is stamp collecting, philately demands a little more ingenuity and effort. Thematic collecting is one solution.

At the most basic level, a subject is chosen. Birds on stamps, butterflies on stamps, volcanoes, or any other subject that takes your fancy. Here we are not looking to accumulate the stamps of any one country. The stamps can come from any country, but it is up to the collector to choose – and track down – the stamp that depicts their theme best. Penguins, for example, appear on the stamps of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, New Zealand, TAAF (French Antarctic), Gambia and many other places.

The 'one country collector' aims to be complete; the collector of penguins is happy to have examples of the main species: Rockhopper, Adélie, King, Emperor etc, but needn't have every last stamp depicting them. It is a more fun way of collecting than trying to complete a country where there will always be some stamps beyond the reach of most people's pocket.



Printing errors

Spectacular errors can occur when printing stamps, which can lead to expensive collectables. In the stamps shown above – 5d Queen Elizabeth II from British Ships, issued on 15 January 1969 – the top stamp is missing the black ink. This error is worth over £2,000.

More enterprising than a 'subject' collection is a 'theme' collection. Perhaps the story of the Red Cross, the voyages of Captain Cook, or the night sky. This last theme, for example, could include stars and constellations, flags, aurora borealis and australis, astronomical telescopes, nocturnal birds, moths, bats, witches on broomsticks, the possibilities are enormous. A theme could also outline the life and career of a local man, Sir Winston Churchill, for example, MP for Epping and then for Woodford.

Collections are not just restricted to stamps. Many collectors include stamp booklets (where the cover design is relevant), postal stationery (pre-paid and stamped postcards, envelopes, air letters and similar), first day covers, special cancellations – or indeed anything else of philatelic interest.

Part of the fun is in discovering something that fills a gap in your collection, or fills out the theme of your thematic collection a little more. You might strike lucky and find a rare stamp, postmark, or even a flaw in a dealer's stock at a fair.

LWDPS run fairs in October and April every year. The next fair is on Saturday 8 October at the Pastoral Centre of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Cambridge Park. Visitors are welcome. Call 020 8989 2885 or visit www.lwdps.org